QUICK SERIES®

FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

MARITAL STRATEGIES

Vet Center

"Keeping the Promise"

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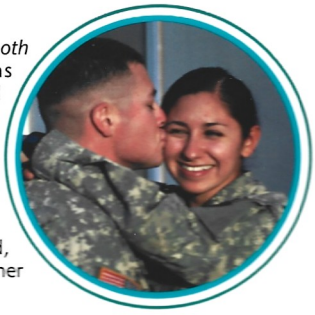
INTRODUCTION

Marriage can be tough under the best of circumstances. A spouse who is deployed on long-term or extended temporary duty (TDY) can place additional strain on a family and test the strength of a marriage.



This guide was developed for *both* marital partners. It contains useful tips, strategies and resources to help strengthen and maintain a healthy relationship. Think of it as an educational or self-help aid.

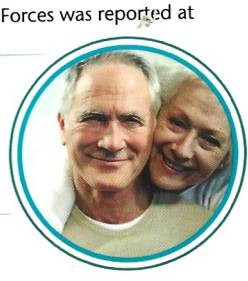
This guide is not a substitute for professional help. Instead, treat it as a tool to use with other resources available to you.

TIP! **Investing in your relationship now will pay dividends down the road.**

Suggestions for Use

1. Each partner should have their own copy of this guide.
2. Preview the information to get an idea of the topics.
3. If possible, read it before deploying, being assigned to long-term duties or extended TDYs.
4. Commit to doing the exercises provided.
5. Allot 20-minute time periods to discuss and practice the skills with your partner.
6. Highlight the sections that are most relevant to you.
7. Review the highlighted section(s) every day for the next 30 days.

FACTS ABOUT Marriage and the Military



- The divorce rate for the U.S. Armed Forces was reported at 3.6% in 2009 and 2010.
- The divorce rate for the general public was around 3.4 persons per thousand in 2009.
- 20% of all marriages fall apart within two years when one spouse is sent off to war.
- The Army has the highest divorce rate. More than 8,000 divorces were reported in 2005. (The Army has the largest number of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.)
- The divorce rate among military women was nearly three times that of military men.
- Enlisted Service members are more likely to end their marriages than officers, probably because they tend to be younger.
- Of first-time marriages that end in divorce, many end in the first 3-5 years.
- Nearly 70% of all married men and 60% of married women have had affairs. Marital problems are associated with decreased work productivity, especially for men.
- While research indicates that issues about money and children are leading causes of divorce, it may be that how couples fight is more important than what they fight about.
- According to a national study by marriage and family counselors, 93% of clients surveyed said they were effectively helped to deal with problems.

TIP! **Invest in building and maintaining a strong marriage.**

THE MARITAL HEALTH CHECKUP

Routine physical checkups help keep you safe and healthy, provide reassurance to you and your loved ones that things are OK, and can help prevent more serious problems from developing by identifying symptoms and potential problems. Identifying symptoms and potential problems early on is key to your physical health. A "marital checkup" can provide the same benefits to individuals, couples and families.

- If there are existing problems, there may be time for a short-term intervention to put things back on track.
- If there are more serious issues or not enough time to deal with them before deployment, temporary strategies can be developed to hold the relationship together until there is an opportunity to address them.
- If a relationship does not require major work, then strategies can focus on strengthening the existing bond between the partners and/or family.

Getting a Marital Checkup

- Visits can be scheduled before deployment, during leave time or after homecoming.
- It's best to meet with a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist, social worker or marriage and/or family counselor.
- You can get a recommendation through friends, family, your chaplain, a TRICARE provider or MilitaryOneSource.com.

What to Expect

- The provider should ask you your purpose for coming and what you hope to accomplish.
- You should be ready to discuss any specific issues, problems or complaints.
- You will usually meet together as a couple and most likely have at least one private session with the provider.
- If you don't want to say something in front of your partner, the individual session is an opportunity to speak privately.
- The provider is likely to give you a series of questionnaires to help evaluate your relationship's strengths and weaknesses.
- Usually, the provider can help you feel better about your relationship, resolve or improve problems and provide tools to reduce the risk of future problems.

TIP! **All couples are likely to have some problems. This is normal and doesn't mean you should panic or immediately file for divorce!**

Questions to Anticipate and Think About

1. What are your concerns about your relationship?
2. Are you having any major problems or conflicts?
3. What are the positive and negative effects you think the deployment may have on you and your relationship?
4. How well do you and your partner communicate?
5. How satisfied are you with the level of intimacy between you and your partner?
6. How do you tend to handle arguments and disagreements?
7. Do you consider your partner to be an independent person or someone who relies heavily on your support?
8. How do you feel about your partner as a parent or future parent?
9. To what degree do you share the same values and goals?
10. Do you see yourselves growing old together?

MARITAL STRENGTH TRAINING

Think of the marital bond you share with your partner as a muscle. You need to exercise it regularly to keep it strong. In fact, with hard work, it can grow stronger. The benefits of a strong and meaningful relationship can help each of you endure hardship and pressure, and keep you together even under the most difficult conditions and circumstances.

Elements of Marital Strength Training

- Remind yourself of your marital vows.
- Really care about strengthening and protecting your relationship.
- Commit to doing what it takes to make it work through the good times and the bad.
- Choose a wide variety of exercises, practices and habits to stay motivated and passionate about improving your relationship.
- Seek to improve yourself as a person and as a partner.

Guiding Questions

- What can I do today that will help make me a better person?
- What can I do today that will help me feel closer to my partner?
- What can I do today that will help my partner feel closer to me?

Sample Actions

Create a list of actions. On the first day of the week or month, commit to one action you will do that day.

1. Send a love letter.
2. Send an e-mail with a positive message.
3. Tell a joke or funny story.
4. Write a sentence using a word from the Marital Adjective Checklist (flip to the "Activities" tab for ideas).
5. Tell your partner about something new you saw, heard or did.
6. Share upcoming plans.
7. Send recent photos.
8. Read your favorite motto on marriage out loud (flip to the "Activities" tab for ideas).
9. Tell someone what is special about your partner.
10. Create and send a brief video that's funny or upbeat.
11. Write and send a poem.
12. Say something positive about your relationship.
13. Look at family picture albums and videos.
14. Plan the homecoming.
15. Have young children send drawings.
16. Send articles you think would be of interest.
17. Share how you solved a problem or handled a difficult situation.
18. Think about your fondest memories of being with your partner.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Think of your relationship as a "work in progress." Seek out ways to keep it fresh, new and healthy, regardless of the circumstances you are in.

1. Send a romantic handwritten note.
2. Talk about a favorite time you shared together.
3. Make some plans for a future trip or vacation.
4. Apologize for a time when you said or did something that was insensitive or uncaring.
5. Give each other a coupon book for favors you can do for each other, such as, "Good for a 30-minute massage" or "One breakfast in bed."
6. Add some spice to your relationship. Plan something new, different or exciting.
7. Keep a journal of events, experiences, feelings, thoughts and questions to share and discuss when you have the opportunity to be together.
8. Create a website to post pictures or videos and keep the lines of communication open during times away.
9. Express yourself. "I feel happy knowing that each day brings me closer to seeing you."
10. Build emotional closeness. Encourage your partner to share his/her feelings and concerns while you listen without interrupting, judging or trying to fix it.
11. Plan a game night with your family or another couple. If you are separated by distance and have access and some knowledge, you can play some games on the Internet.

TIP! **Commit to scheduling daily, weekly and monthly activities. Make it a priority and follow through.**

THE MARITAL ADJECTIVE CHECKLIST

Select a word from the list below that you feel is true of your partner and write a sentence that includes that word. Post it where you can see it and send a copy to your partner.

Active
Admirable
Adoring
Affectionate
Amazing
Appealing
Approving
Attractive
Beaming
Beautiful
Calm
Capable
Caring
Charming
Committed
Communicative
Compassionate
Complex
Confident
Content
Cool
Cooperative
Courageous
Creative
Cuddly
Dedicated
Desirable
Devoted
Dynamic
Energetic
Enjoyable
Enticing
Exceptional
Exhilarating
Fabulous
Fair
Fantastic
Finest
Firm
Flexible
Friendly
Fun
Funny
Generous
Glowing
Handsome
Happy
Honest
Incredible
Interesting
Kind
Loving
Loyal
Noble
Open-minded
Outstanding
Passionate
Patient
Perceptive
Perfect
Persistent
Popular
Proud
Receptive
Reliable
Resourceful
Respectful
Sensitive
Sexy
Skillful
Smart
Special
Stable
Strong-willed
Supportive
Sweet
Sympathetic
Talented
Tender
Thoughtful
Trustworthy
Understanding
Upbeat
Warm

MOTTOS AND SAYINGS

Mottos, or sayings, provide us with anchors to hold us close to those ideas that are important to us. They can provide us with confidence and hope and reinforce our core beliefs. Use sayings as healthy reminders to strengthen your commitment to your relationship. Add your own mottos and develop shared sayings with your partner.

The secret to having a good marriage is to understand that marriage must be total, it must be permanent and it must be equal. – Frank Pittman

What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility. – Leo Tolstoy

The most important marriage skill is listening to your partner in a way that they can't possibly doubt that you love them. – Diane Sollee

A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person. – Mignon McLaughlin

Marriage, ultimately, is the practice of becoming passionate friends. – Harville Hendrix

As for his secret to staying married: "My wife tells me if I ever decided to leave, she is coming with me." – Jon Bon Jovi

Marriage orients men and women toward the future, asking them not just to commit to each other but to plan, to earn, to save and to devote themselves to advancing their children's prospects. – Daniel Patrick Moynihan

AFFIRMATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Affirmations are short, positive statements that strengthen, support and reinforce what you believe in.

Say affirmations out loud or record them and listen to them several times a day for three weeks. Repeat them with feeling and determination. Select affirmations from the list below or create your own.

Sample Affirmations

1. *I love my partner and my partner loves me.*
2. *I am committed to my marriage 100%.*
3. *I have a great relationship.*
4. *I am loyal and faithful to my partner and my partner is loyal and faithful to me.*
5. *I always communicate openly and honestly with my partner.*
6. *I support my partner during difficult times and receive support in return.*
7. *I strive to improve both my relationship and myself each day.*
8. *Tough times strengthen my commitment to my partner.*
9. *I am proud of my partner.*
10. *I respect my partner.*
11. *I admit mistakes and ask for forgiveness from my partner.*
12. *I forgive my partner's mistakes.*
13. *I let go of past hurts and resentments.*
14. *I nurture my relationship daily through loving thoughts and deeds.*
15. *My partner has many excellent qualities.*
16. *I am very fortunate to have my partner.*
17. *I seek to understand my partner.*
18. *I work out differences with my partner.*

Verbal Communication Skills

Communication skills are considered one of the hallmarks of successful relationships. Being a good communicator is having the ability to listen and express oneself accurately and effectively. Communication occurs on both the verbal and nonverbal level.

Active Listening

In active listening, the listener makes a conscious effort to fully understand the entire message the speaker is trying to communicate.

1. Using your own words, repeat what the speaker just said.
2. Use empathy. Understand the emotion behind the words.
3. Clarify the speaker's position.
4. Ask open-ended questions to encourage the speaker to talk openly and freely.
5. Summarize the discussion.

Example

- ***Reflection:*** *So you aren't sure you can manage the finances in my absence?*
- ***Empathy:*** *I sense your nervousness.*
- ***Clarification:*** *Are you unsure about how to balance the checkbook or do you think we will run out of money?*
- ***Open-ended question:*** *What else about managing the finances concerns you?*
- ***Summarization:*** *So you have some doubts about your ability to manage the finances in my absence because you think there may not be enough money to pay the bills.*

Expressive Skills

1. Speak clearly and loudly enough to be heard.
2. Stay on topic.
3. If needed, write out and rehearse what you want to say.

Example

"John, I would like to talk with you about something that is troubling me. I don't feel I have a good understanding of the finances. Specifically, I am not sure what bills I need to pay, when I need to pay them and which account I should write the checks from. Can we please set a time for us to review this?"

Nonverbal Communication Skills

Facial expressions, body language and gestures go a long way toward either strengthening or weakening verbal messages.

1. Make good eye contact when speaking and listening, as this shows interest.
2. Avoid glaring or staring, as this may make your partner uncomfortable. Briefly glance away to lower the intensity.
3. Stand or sit within a comfortable distance of your partner, usually 3-5 feet. Lean slightly forward to show you are interested.
4. If you are much taller or bigger, consider sitting to avoid unconsciously intimidating your partner.
5. Nod your head occasionally to encourage your partner to continue sharing his/her thoughts.
6. Stay focused on both the person and the message.
7. Avoid looking distracted, such as darting your eyes around the room or fidgeting in your chair.
8. Be aware of your partner's nonverbal behavior as this may be a clue to their inner feelings.
9. Try to understand the meaning of facial expressions and body language in your partner, such as smiles, frowns, eyes blinking rapidly, and crossed arms and legs. What is your partner communicating to you?

FAIR FIGHTING FOR COUPLES

Disagreements, arguments and discussions are a normal part of any healthy relationship. In a "fair fight" couples can even agree to disagree without harming their relationship. Learning the art of fair fighting can preserve and protect your marriage.

Rules of Engagement

1. Find a time and place where you can talk privately and without distractions.
2. If you are preoccupied or overwhelmed by something else, try to put off your discussion briefly until you can be more fully present.
3. Limit your discussion to one or two topics and don't get sidetracked with other issues.
4. Agree on a time limit (30-45 minutes).
5. Stay focused on the present. Don't bring up the past unless it is specifically relevant.
6. In your personal life, rank does not matter. You do not "give" or "obey" orders.
7. Avoid "all or nothing" accusations like, "You always..." or "You never..." These statements are probably not true and may put your partner on the defensive.
8. Do not threaten to leave or divorce unless it's a last resort or you really mean it.
9. Keep a level head.
10. Treat each other with respect.

11. If you feel you are getting too upset, try to calm down or ask for a brief "time out" to settle down.
12. Attack the problem behavior and not the person.
13. Avoid ridicule, sarcasm, name calling and cursing.
14. Do not use physical contact: holding, shoving, pushing, punching, etc.
15. Avoid blackmail of any kind: "If you do such and such I will take the kids and you will never see us again."
16. Do not follow your partner into another room.
17. Do not physically block your partner from leaving the room or house.

18. Not all arguments can be settled in one session. Agree to meet again.
19. For some arguments and issues it may be beneficial to have an objective third party facilitate, like a counselor or family mediator.

TIP! Practice fair fighting; don't wait for a major issue to arise. Practice developing your skills on a series of smaller issues that are less emotionally charged.

THE ABCs OF A STRONGER MARRIAGE

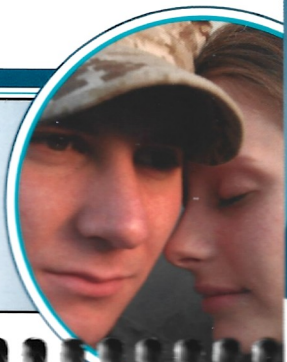
Our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and self-talk largely determine how we feel about ourselves and others. Developing greater emotional self-control helps us to manage our emotions more effectively and interact better with others.

While we can't change events or situations, we can change our reactions to them and how we feel based on what we tell ourselves.

1. First, learn to recognize the connection between a situation, what you tell yourself about the situation and how you feel as a result.
2. Decide if the intensity of your feelings is appropriate for what happened.
3. Decide if your feelings are desirable or if you want to change them.
4. Next, substitute more desirable and/or healthier thoughts about the situation.

This process will result in a greater sense of emotional control and increased ability to communicate, negotiate and/or problem solve with others.

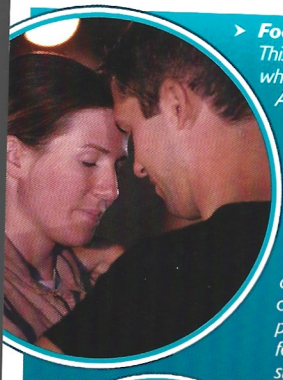
Key



- **A** The event, situation or activity.
- **B** Your belief, attitude or what you are thinking about the situation.
- **C** Your emotion or feeling: angry, depressed, fearful, guilty, etc.

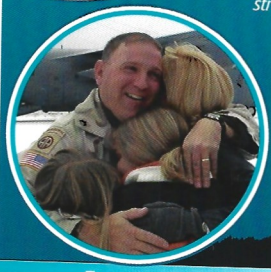
Example

- **A =** *"My husband/wife tells me he/she will be deployed next month."*
- **B =** *"I'm worried about his/her safety."*
- **C =** *"I feel fear, anxiety and panic."*



➤ ***Focus on changing the "B" to:*** *This will be hard for both of us. This is what my partner was trained to do. Although there is a risk of death and/or serious injury, the vast majority of those deployed come back safely. I'll remain positive and cope the best way I can, no matter what happens.*

➤ ***Result:*** *A new "C" or emotional consequence. Panic and fear is replaced with a healthy concern, cautious optimism and perhaps a useful discussion about feelings and practical coping strategies.*



TIP! This approach is known as rational-emotive behavior therapy or cognitive-behavior therapy. To learn more, visit **www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies.**

MARITAL SUCCESS USING HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis is a wonderful tool that both partners can learn how to use. It can be beneficial to your personal, married and family life.

The Benefits of Hypnosis

1. Calming yourself before having a difficult discussion with your partner.
2. Reducing unnecessary or excessive worry associated with fear.
3. Feeling more confident before tackling a difficult situation.
4. Staying more focused and attentive during conversations.
5. Increasing motivation to handle unpleasant tasks.
6. Enhancing positive feelings toward others.
7. Improving your mood with more rest, relaxation and a sound sleep.

The Basics

- Hypnosis is best learned by working with a licensed mental health professional who has specialized training in hypnosis and can customize hypnosis to your individual needs.
- A second choice is through prerecorded tapes that are available on a variety of topics and can be found at bookstores and on many websites.
- A third choice is self-hypnosis, where you learn to relax yourself, create your own suggestions, make a tape and rehearse with it.

The Steps

1. Hypnosis is a combination of relaxation and suggestion.
2. Relaxation can be achieved through a combination of taking long, slow, deep breaths, tensing and relaxing various muscle groups in the body and visualizing yourself in a quiet, pleasant, calm place.
3. Suggestions take the form of words and images.
4. Write out a script of how you want to think, feel and behave in the future.
5. Be specific, clear and positive.
6. Record the script.
7. Relax and play the recorded suggestions.
8. Listen to the tape 3 times a day for 3 weeks.

Example

My partner and I have a deep love for each other. The strong bond between us keeps our relationship resilient. No matter what happens in the future we will continue to support each other through thick and thin, through the good times and the bad. Our trust, respect and confidence in each other are unconditional and unwavering.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT STRATEGIES

1. Anticipate each other's needs during separation.
2. Each of you should make a list of what you expect of the other person during this time.
3. Talk to each other about your hopes, concerns and practical matters.

TIP! Those who fail to plan, plan to fail.

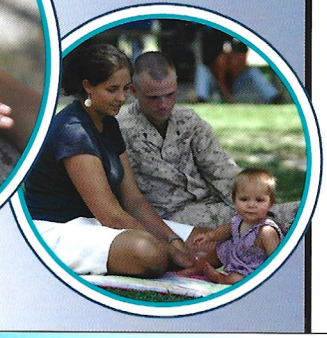
Sample Discussion Questions

1. What have you each been relying on your partner for that you will now need to manage on your own?
2. What are the different duties and extra responsibilities that each of you will be required to attend to?
3. What are the resources available to each of you, both before, during and after the deployment?
4. If you have children, what will you tell them? How will you prepare them? What will you now expect of them?
5. How will you stay in touch during the deployment?
6. Do you expect any major events to occur within the deployment period (like a new baby)?
7. How will you handle urgent situations?
8. How will you spend the available time together prior to deployment?
9. Will you attend a marriage enrichment program, join a support group or attend informational meetings?

TIP! Plan these meetings with your partner over a number of sessions. Don't wait until the last minute to try to discuss everything at once.

General Strategies

1. Don't suffer in silence.
2. Seek out help and counsel from others who have "been there, done that."
3. Seek and give support to others who are in your situation.
4. Learn about the resources available to you individually, as a couple and as a family through both the military and private sectors.
5. Consider some sessions with a trained mental health professional to learn skills related to personal stress management.



TIP! There are many resources available to help you prepare for and manage the changes that deployment creates.

Pre-Deployment Strategies

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF DEPLOYMENT

While deployment is often associated with hardship, danger and negative consequences, looking at the advantages and benefits of deployment can provide a source of strength and motivation.

- Deployment can provide the remaining spouse and children the chance to develop a greater sense of responsibility and independence. This can result in increased self-confidence and self-esteem.
- The relationship between the non-deployed spouse and children can be strengthened as a result of depending more on one another and working more closely together.
- Living apart can lead to a greater appreciation and respect for each other: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."
- The deployed spouse may bring back valuable insights and experiences about other people and cultures, which can enrich the family.
- Deployment can lead to a variety of duties resulting in increased pay, which can be of help to the individual and family in meeting expenses and/or saving for a special purchase.
- Some individuals may enjoy the time away as a time to think and reflect.

Other Benefits May Include:

- The satisfaction of serving one's country.
- The potential to help others.
- The chance to put one's skills and training into practice.
- Developing close bonds and personal relationships with unit members.
- An increased respect from others upon returning home.

TIP! On a separate sheet of paper, write down the personal benefits you derive from serving.

PREPARING FOR DEPLOYMENT

Understanding your preferred methods for giving and receiving information and communicating can help you choose among the many options available to you.

1. Consider your learning style. How do you learn best?
2. Do you like reading books, pamphlets and newsletters?
3. Are you comfortable with the computer and using e-mail, chat rooms, discussion groups and forums?
4. What about giving and receiving information through videos, Skype™, YouTube™ and related visual methods of communication?
5. Are you an auditory person who enjoys talking on the phone and/or in person?
6. Be creative. If you don't like reading, have your partner record himself/herself as he/she reads this guide aloud. Then you can listen to it in sections and hear your partner's voice.
7. If English is not your native language and you are not yet fully bilingual, consider having a friend translate this guide or record it in your primary language.
8. Do you like sending and receiving photos and/or handwritten letters and postcards?
9. Are you comfortable attending group meetings? Are you able to listen carefully, take notes and ask questions in this setting?
10. Do you learn best in a one-on-one situation?

Discuss with your partner the kinds of information you want to give and receive and perhaps the kinds of information you would rather not know about. For example:

- *Do you want to know that your partner is about to go on a risky mission tomorrow?*
- *Do you want to know that your child was late for school yesterday?*

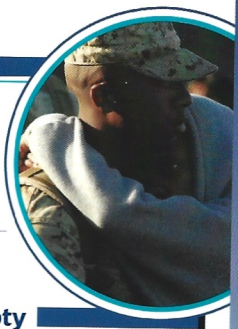
TIP! Discussing the kinds and amount of information you will share can provide support and reduce stress on you and your relationship.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH DEPLOYMENT

1. Focus on What You Can Control and Accept the Things You Can't

- You *can't* control the missions you go on.
- You *can* control what you choose to think about the mission.
- You *can't* control whether or not your spouse will come home safely.
- You *can* control your expectation that your spouse will return safely and picture your spouse proudly returning home looking fit and feeling healthy.

2. Embrace Change



- Dates change, missions change, types and frequency of communicating change.
- Expect the unexpected.
- Cultivate tolerance and patience.
- Be willing to "go with the flow."

3. Look at the Glass as Half Full Rather than Half Empty

- Never assume the worst. Stay positive and focused on the present.
- Always think of other reasons and possibilities for things happening or not happening.
- Associate with positive, optimistic people. Stay away from naysayers and bitter or angry people.
- Find reliable and objective sources of news. The public news outlets are generally geared toward presenting the worst and most catastrophic stories they can find. Take what you read, see and hear on the news "with a grain salt."

4. Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

- Due to limited time or added responsibilities, your house may not be as clean as it usually is or as you would like.
- Maybe your spouse forgot to pay a bill. Cut your partner some slack. Remember, no one is perfect.

5. Keep Your Body Strong, Your Mind Calm and Your Spirit Upbeat

- Practice deep breathing, prayer or even listening to quiet music.
- Get physical: run, lift weights, stretch.
- Keep busy and productive. Feel good about what you accomplish.
- Think, say or do something nice for your partner every day.
- Avoid junk food. Make the time and effort to eat healthy meals.
- Get proper rest and sleep.
- Maintain your health by making and keeping doctor appointments.

6. Communicate with Care

- Remember what you discussed with your partner about communication before deployment.
- Try not to write or call when you are emotionally upset.
- Use one of the self-soothing techniques to calm yourself.
- Talk to a trusted friend or advisor before saying or doing something you may regret later.

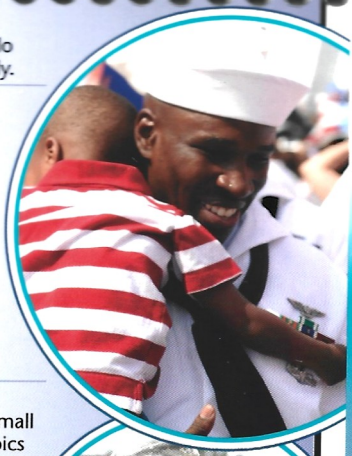
Coping with Deployment

HELPING KIDS COPE

- Helping kids cope with a parent's deployment, separation and return, will depend on many factors, including the age and maturity of the child.
- Kids may have many questions and concerns that they cannot or will not share.
- Helping kids cope is a shared parental responsibility. Resources like extended families, schools and local community centers can all help.

Adjustment Strategies

1. The more adjusted the parents are to the deployment, the more likely children will be.
2. Explain that going away is temporary and an important part of the parent's job.
3. Show enthusiasm and excitement about the "trip."
4. Reassure them that you will be in touch through cards, calls, e-mail, etc.
5. Ask open-ended questions like:
   - "Would you like to see and know about where I will be going? I can show you on this map."
   - "What do you think about my trip?"
   - "What do you think it will be like for you here with _____?"
   - "Is there something you want to ask me?"
6. Some families might choose to have the kids help in the packing.
7. Spend some time alone with each child.
8. Set aside some time to do something fun as a family.
9. Research together and/or read stories about the people, culture and country you will be going to.
10. Alert the school and teachers so they can help. Some teachers may adjust their curriculum or create projects and ideas that can aid in adjustment.



11. The school guidance counselor may provide small group discussions on topics related to being separated from a parent.
12. At home, rules, roles and responsibilities should be reviewed. Consistency, structure and regular routines help offset the separation and uncertainty associated with deployment.

13. Although the at-home parent may be quite busy with added responsibilities, it's important to pay attention to your children, especially when they are being good. It only takes a moment to reinforce positive behavior.

TIP! For more information on this topic, obtain a copy of the QuickSeries® publication, *Military Kids: A Parent's Guide.*

Helping Kids Cope

RETURNING HOME

Homecoming will undoubtedly be a time of celebration mixed with some confusion, uncertainty and readjustment for the family.

Strategies for the Returning Partner

1. Take advantage of exit interviews, evaluations, debriefings and reintegration meetings offered by your particular branch of service.
2. Be prepared to transition from the routine, structure and order of being abroad to that of civilian life.
3. Accept the fact that your partner and children may have grown or changed since you last saw them.
4. Don't overreact to possible changes in the rules, responsibilities or decisions that may have been made in your absence.
5. Thank your partner for their efforts in maintaining things on the "home front."
6. Consider personal counseling to assess and treat anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, if present.
7. Follow up with appropriate medical and/or rehabilitation treatment if you incurred any physical problems while deployed.
8. Be patient with yourself and your family as you readjust to home life.
9. Work out a plan with your partner to deal with problems and issues that may have existed prior to deployment.
10. Consider a few couples' sessions with a marriage counselor or mental health professional to assist in providing a smooth transition.

Strategies for the Partner at Home

1. Be welcoming and listen to your partner's experiences with patience and an open mind.
2. Encourage your partner to talk about what being away was like.
3. Share and show happiness at your partner's return.
4. Explain any changes that may have occurred.
5. Make time to get acquainted again.
6. Be alert to negative changes in your partner's personality, mood or behavior.
7. Help arrange, encourage and attend debriefings to aid in readjusting to coming home.
8. Reinforce your appreciation and pride in your partner's work and sacrifice.
9. Review handouts and materials regarding returning home issues to better understand, prepare for and manage situations that may arise.

Communication Is King

Coming home is associated with numerous meetings and discussions on a broad range of topics and issues. The way you phrase comments, questions and suggestions can result in cooperation or defiance.

Examples of Helpful Phrases and Questions

- Would you consider…
- It would be so nice if…
- I would love it if…
- What do you think about…
- Do you think we might…

Returning Home

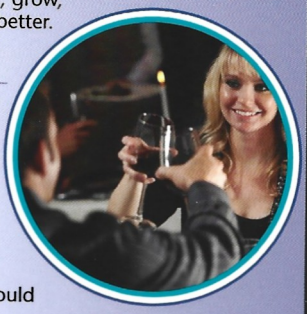
Examples of Unhelpful Phrases and Questions

- You never…
- I hate it when…
- I can't stand…
- You're always…
- Why don't you ever…
- What's wrong with…

TIP! Practice increasing the helpful phrases and decreasing the unhelpful phrases. Both of you will get more of what you want.

More Tips

1. Schedule regular times to meet, discuss and prioritize things that need to be addressed. Intimacy, children and finances are usually the top issues.
2. Be positive. Use terms like, grow, improve, enhance, make better. Avoid negative terms like: problems, difficulties.
3. Avoid talking in extremes like: "I can't stand this" or "You should have never…"
4. Use expressions like: "Please consider…"; "I would appreciate it if you would…"; "Can you understand that…"; "It would be so helpful if…"



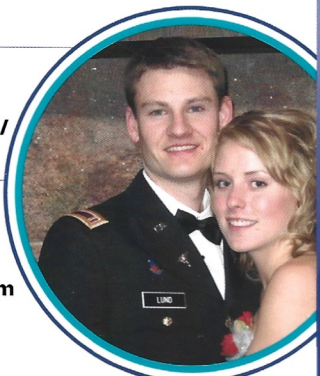
TIP! While every couple is different and circumstances vary greatly, following these general principles should help you and your partner make the transition easier for all.

Returning Home

RESOURCES

The military offers a number of resources to help couples keep their relationship and families strong. Visit the following websites for more information:

- The Army's Strong Bonds Marriage Enrichment Program
  www.strongbonds.org
- The Army's Deployment Cycle Support Process
  www.armyg1.army.mil/dcs
- Resilience Training – Targets all phases of the deployment cycle
  www.resilience.army.mil
- Air Force Crossroads – Reunion, Reintegration and Marriage
  www.afcrossroads.com/famseparation/ret_marriage.cfm
- Navy Services FamilyLine
  www.nsfamilyline.org
- Navy ChaplainCare self-help articles
  www.chaplaincare.navy.mil/selfhelp.htm
- Military OneSource – Resources for Service Members and Families
  www.militaryonesource.com



Resources

Individual and Group Options for Help

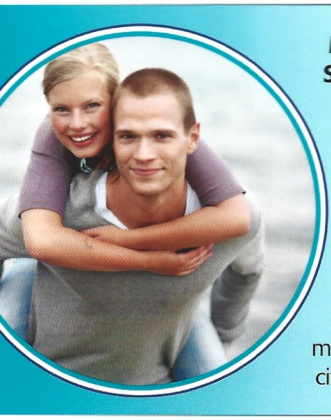
Whether you are seeking information, education, marriage enhancement or family counseling, individual and group options each have their own strong points and drawbacks.

Individual Options

Advantages	Disadvantages
➤ Privacy and confidentiality. ➤ Focus is on your own goals, providing a personalized plan based on your needs. ➤ Provides better use of your time within the class or session. ➤ Greater flexibility in arranging meeting times. ➤ Greater confidentiality.	➤ Cost may be a factor. ➤ Number of sessions may be limited.

Group Options

Advantages	Disadvantages
➤ Group support: feeling accepted, not isolated or different. ➤ Learning from others. ➤ More structured learning format.	➤ Less time to focus on your personal issues. ➤ Reluctance by some to discuss personal issues in a public setting. ➤ Less flexibility in options and meeting locations.



Military- vs. Civilian-Sponsored Resources

For those considering programs not affiliated with their Service, a variety of civilian resources are available. Think about your individual needs and how they can best be met by either a military or civilian (private) program.

Military

Advantages	Disadvantages
➤ These programs will likely be free. ➤ They will probably be relevant to the needs of military couples and families. ➤ They will usually be more convenient in terms of times and locations.	➤ Some couples may feel uncomfortable sharing personal matters with people they may interact with on a regular basis. ➤ Some people may feel that participating could have an impact on their career path. ➤ Some may feel a military-sponsored program may put the needs of the military above their own.

Civilian

Advantages	Disadvantages
➤ May provide a broader selection of help, information and skills. ➤ Couples may feel more comfortable disclosing personal matters with someone not connected with the military. ➤ Couples may have more choice in selecting the type of service and provider.	➤ Couples may not feel understood by someone who isn't familiar with the military experience. ➤ Services may not be free. ➤ Program availability may not coincide with military schedules.

TIP! Make your own list of the pros and cons for each program or service you are considering and discuss them with your partner.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **www.healthymarriageinfo.org**
  Tip Sheets from The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) is a clearinghouse for high-quality, balanced and timely information and resources on healthy marriage (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Family Assistance).
- **www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/benefits**
  Benefits of a Healthy Marriage from the Healthy Marriage Initiative (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Office of Family Assistance).
- **www.aamft.org**
  The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) is the professional association for the field of marriage and family therapy.
- **www.counsel-search.com**
  National Directory of Marriage Counselors and Family Counselors. It contains free articles, resources and referral information.
- **www.quickseries.com**
  The publishers of this guide and others related to deployment, reunion, family readiness, etc.

Local and State Programs

Use your Yellow Pages™ or the Internet to search for civilian marriage-enrichment programs in your community and state.

Resources

Marriage can be tough under any circumstance. The challenges of deployment put additional strain on the family and test the strength of the marriage.

- Marital health checkup
- Pre-deployment strategies
- Coping with deployment
- Marital strength training
- Communication and fighting fair
- Homecoming

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